Third Century

NASA

In the World: a Time Of Difficult Choices

Nuclear terrorism, mass starvation, economic blackmail—the dangers are agonizing. Question: Will a weary nation meet the test or retreat into "fortress America"?

AS AN ERA of American supremacy ends, the U.S. is looking for a new role to play in a disordered world.

Over the past 30 years, this country has dominated the international scene—militarily, economically, politically—on a scale unparalleled in history.

Now, as the Third Century begins, America's future in the world seems uncertain and, to some, ominous.

Its strategic pre-eminence is rivaled by a second superpower. Its economic independence is eroding with increasing reliance on foreign oil and raw materials. Its will to lead the non-Communist world is widely questioned.

Crucial decisions. Not since its founding 200 years ago has the nation faced challenges from abroad more complex or potentially more agonizing than those on the horizon today. How Americans cope with these challenges in the next few decades will have much to do with the state of the union at the close of the Third Century.

From leading experts on foreign affairs comes a catalogue of these unresolved and crucial elements in the American future.

First and foremost: The determined Soviet drive for global supremacy could leave the U.S. isolated in a hostile world and vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. As things are going now, some say, Russia could establish its primacy before the end of the 1980s.

Next: Unless the U.S. can curb the spread of nuclear weapons, strategic specialists predict that these will be used during the next 25 years, probably not in conflict between the superpowers but in a local war—between Israel and the Arabs perhaps, or India and Pakistan. Another real threat: terrorists armed with atomic weapons looted from U.S. arsenals overseas or produced with plutonium stolen from nuclear reactors.

Then: The end of U.S. self-sufficiency is on the horizon. Just as this country already relies increasingly on Middle Eastern oil, it will, by the year 2000, depend primarily on foreign sources for 12 of the 13 basic raw materials essential for a modern economy. Guaranteeing reasonable access to these materials, or developing substitutes, will rank high on America's agenda in the Third Century.

Finally: The "third world" nightmare is moving toward reality. With the world's population exploding, experts estimate that it will reach 6.3 billion by the year 2000, compared with 4 billion today. Almost all of that increase, more than 2 billion, will be concentrated in the poor countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America—the nations least able to feed their people even today. To make matters worse, what little hope most of these countries had of industrial development now has been blighted by the skyrocketing price of oil. "Fantastic turmoil" and famine on a mass scale are deemed virtually inescapable.

Some students of foreign affairs see the combination of too many people and too little food as the principal source of international instability in the future.

Prof. Joseph S. Nye, Jr., of Harvard poses the question: "Is it unrealistic to imagine a small group of MIT-trained sons and daughters of Indian, Japanese and American middle-class parents threatening to detonate a crude plutonium bomb in Boston unless American aid to Asia is immediately increased?"

Philip Trezise of the Brookings Institution in Washington, warns of a different danger: "If you consider the problem this country already has with illegal aliens, you can imagine how that problem will grow as the Mexican population reaches something like 100 million by the end of the century. Mexico simply won't be able to cope, and the poor will move across the border in increasing numbers in search of work."

Food and famine. For the U.S., the desperate plight of the third world poses what may well prove to be the most agonizing challenge of all in coming decades. The reason: This country and Canada have emerged in recent years as the world's breadbasket, accounting for no less than 90 per cent of all food exports.

Thus, America's role as one of the last great food exporters will impose exceptional responsibilities on this country but paradoxically it also could prove a new source of international clout. Says a special study by the Central Intelligence Agency:

"The world's increasing dependence on American surpluses portends an increase in U.S. power and influence, especially vis-à-vis the food-deficit poor countries. Indeed, in times of shortage the U.S. will face difficult choices about how to allocate its surplus between affluent purchasers and the hungry world."

This study also foresees a dramatic change in America's role if the earth's climate continues to cool for the next several decades as it has in recent years.

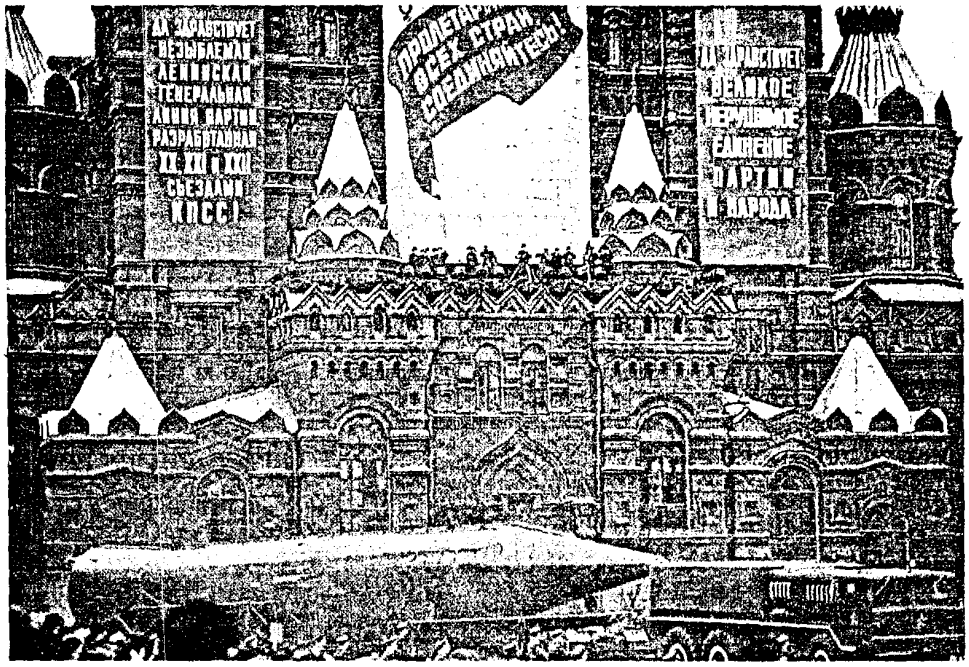
"In a cooler and therefore hungrier world, the U.S.'s near-monopoly position as food exporter . . . could give the U.S. a measure of power it had never had before—possibly an economic and political dominance greater than that of the immediate post-World War II years."

America's "food power" will be counterbalanced to some degree by this country's growing dependence on imported fuel and raw materials, temporarily at least. Mideastern oil producers already have demonstrated how, by forming a cartel, they can jack up prices to extortionate levels and influence the foreign policy of the U.S. and its Western European and Japanes allies.

Quest for energy. Will America be similarly vulnerable to future cartels organized by producers of other essential raw materials?

Maybe, but most experts agree that it will be harder for producers to organize a cartel similar to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and easier for the U.S. to develop substitutes. Two specialists, H. E. Goeller, a senior engineer at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and Alvin M. Weinberg, director of the Institute for Energy Analysis, say: "The key lies in an inexhaustible and secure supply of energy, enabling the U.S. to produce substitutes for most materials that might be cut off.

Many experts call for a crash program,



LOCKWOOD—BLACK STAR

Russia's growing military power—symbolized by this missile paraded through Moscow's Red Square—looms as the No. 1 challenge confronting the United States in tomorrow's world.

ALAIN NOGUES—MAGNUM

"Third world" nightmare is too little food for an exploding population. The threat of famine could lead to turmoil in many impoverished countries and potentially even to international conflict.

in co-operation with European and Japanese allies, to reduce drastically the West's dependence on Mideastern oil and weaken the OPEC cartel. They maintain that success or failure to carry out such a program will determine in important ways the role the U.S. can play in the world in its Third Century.

All this adds up to what Secretary of State Henry Kissinger calls "the new agenda," which is nothing less than the problem of organizing a new world economic order designed to meet the needs of the rich and poor nations alike in an equitable manner.

Yet, it is the "old agenda," the challenge posed by Communist Russia, that will remain the major preoccupation of American policy makers for the predictable future.

In coming decades, the Kremlin's challenge is bound to grow more complex and potentially far more dangerous. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, counselor of the State Department and a top Soviet specialist, explains why: "In the broad

GRANT HEILMAN

U.S. power in the future will stem in large part from the efficiency of America's farmers.

DIFFICULT CHOICES

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sweep of history, Soviet Russia is only just beginning its truly 'imperial' phase."

There is considerable disagreement as to whether—given the volatile expansion of education, communications and military technology—any superpowers, individually or collectively, can keep order and peace in a tidy world of power blocs and spheres of influence.

What's clear is this: The Russians during the past 10 years have overcome an enormous nuclear advantage held by the U.S. in the 1960s. They have effectively challenged American sea power. Now their goal is strategic superiority over the U.S. across the board.

America's response to this challenge, according to most strategists, will be crucial to the reshaping of tomorrow's world. Any real sign of U.S. weakness, the strategists say, could bring a worldwide slide toward accommodation with the Soviet Union—and a retreat by this country into a beleaguered "fortress America."

Even now, U.S. relations with Western Europe are being complicated by significant gains of Communist parties in Italy, France, Portugal and Spain. Question: Can an Alliance organized to contain Communist Russia survive with Communists playing a role in Allied governments? Secretary of State Kissinger is skeptical.

On the other hand, the prospect of Communist participation in NATO governments seems to trouble the Soviet leaders almost as much as it does the Americans, especially if Western European Communists really mean to play the democratic game.

In the Far East, the U.S. faces a different kind of challenge to its delicate and complex relationships with Japan, a formal ally; Communist China, a "semi-ally," and Russia, a formidable foe.

The Japanese seem inclined to continue relying on America for their security as long as their confidence in the U.S. is not undermined. But any hint that Washington is prepared to write off South Korea would, as some Western experts see it, prompt Japan to "go nuclear" to provide its own security guarantees—thereby increasing instability in the Far East and weakening the U.S. position.

What of the United States and Communist China?

The Chinese turned to this country for security in the late 1960s from fear of Russia. If they believe that the U.S. is pulling back in the face of rising Soviet power, they may feel the urge for an accommodation with Moscow, whatever their deep differences.

For the U.S. this eventuality could be calamitous. Reason: Moscow no longer would have to be prepared in depth for a two-front war, one in the Far East and the other in Europe. And the Kremlin also would be freed of its present restraints imposed by the thought of Washington and Peking forming an anti-Soviet axis.

Specter of war. In the past 35 years, the U.S. has been involved in a world war and two "local" conflicts that resulted in hundreds of thousands of American casualties.

Will that pattern still prevail in the coming decades?

Experts tend to see all-out war between the superpowers a remote danger, as long as a deliberate attack by one side risks a devastating counterblow from the other. But there still are plenty of powder kegs scattered over the globe. And that perennial hazard is multiplied by the spread of nuclear knowledge and materials. Prof. George Rathjens of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology says that in the next 25 years there will be 1,000 reactors globally, producing enough materials for 50,000 bombs.

"No guarantee." Secretary of State Kissinger, speaking from his experience in trying to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, says:

"We have no guarantee that some local conflict will not explode beyond control. We have a responsibility to prevent such crises. This must be a permanent preoccupation of statesmen who are concerned for the preservation of peace over the next decades."

Such statesmen say it is the international role that Americans choose to play in the Third Century that ultimately will measure the risk of a holocaust.

So far that U.S. role seems undefined.

In the aftermath of the Vietnam trauma and weariness with global burdens, many of yesteryear's liberal internationalists are turning into today's most outspoken neoisolationists.

Conservative businessmen and farmers, who once favored a tough policy of containing Russia, now are slow to oppose concessions that might expand economic relations with the Soviet Union.

Revulsion is firm against the notion of the U.S. acting as world policeman, partly because the Vietnam defeat brought home to many the limits of American power and partly because few believe any longer that Americans can solve world problems simply by throwing money at them.

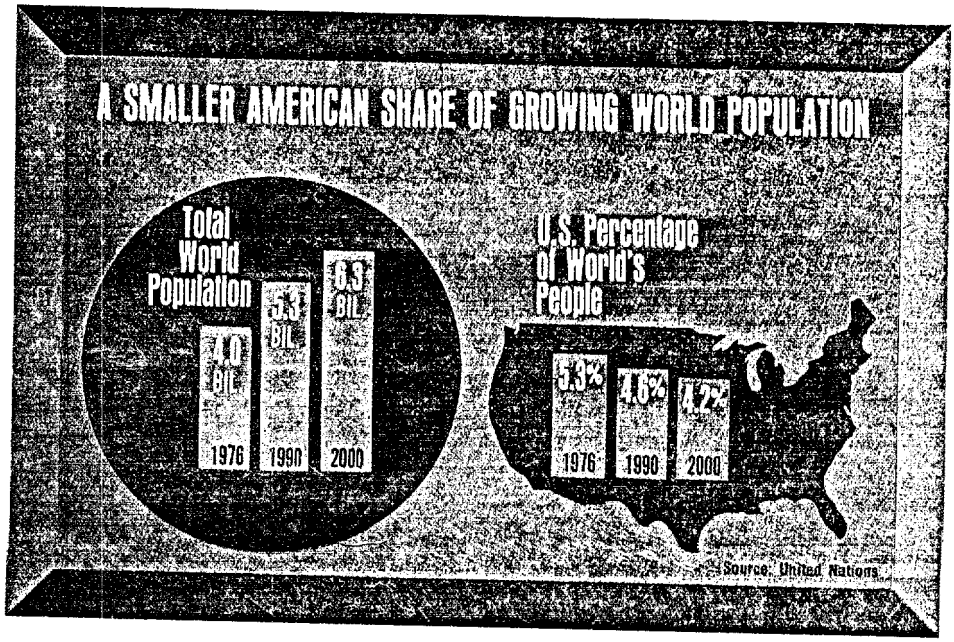
Area of agreement. A consensus does appear to be forming on one critical issue—the need to maintain an effective balance of military power against the Soviet Union.

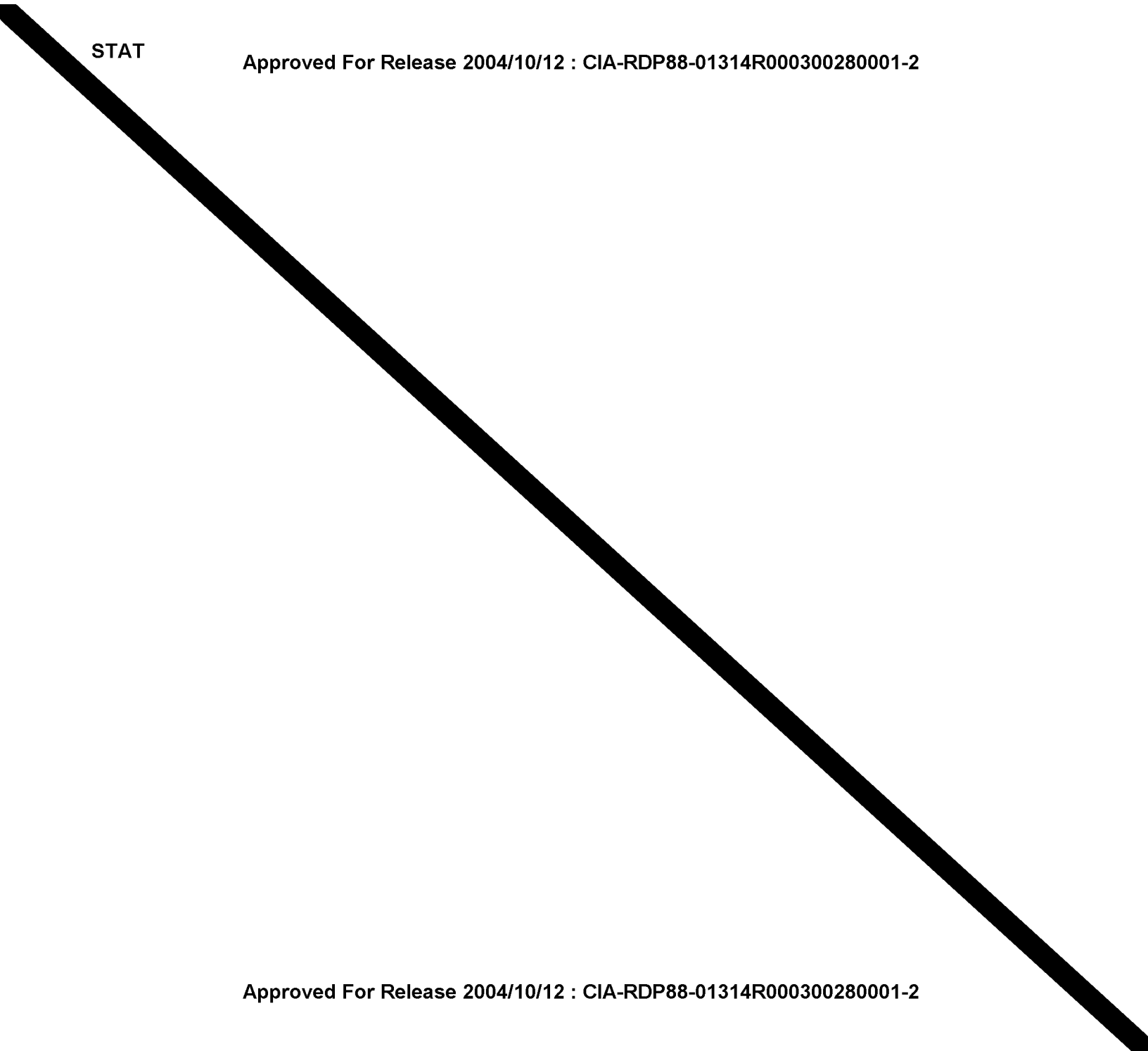
What is lacking, however, is consensus on how and when U.S. armed might should be used to prevent the Soviets from expanding their power globally, as they did, for example, by exploiting local conflicts like the one in Angola. Says Secretary of State Kissinger:

"One of the greatest factors of uncertainty in the world today is concern about America's will and constancy."

That concern itself speaks volumes about the prevailing mood in the world of America's Third Century.

For the time being, much of that world will continue to look to the U.S. for security against Soviet expansionism and for leadership in creating a new economic order. Only the American response to this challenge will clarify and





Approved For Release 2004/10/12 : CIA-RDP88-01314R000300280001-2